

Elizabeth Peet.

LETTER

TO THE

PUPILS ON LEAVING

THE

NEW-YORK INSTITUTION FOR THE INSTRUCTION

OF THE

DEAF AND DUMB.

BY

HARVEY PRINDLE PEET, A. M.

PRESIDENT OF THE INSTITUTION.

NEW-YORK:

EGBERT, HOVEY & KING, 374 PEARL-STREET,
PRINTERS TO THE INSTITUTION.

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FAREWELL LETTER.

To-day, MY BELOVED PUPILS, those, who for years have watched over your welfare, and have carefully sought to train your young steps in the pleasant paths of knowledge and virtue and happiness, must bid you farewell. You now go into the world of those who hear, where, I hope and trust, you will meet with much real kindness and assistance, but where also you must prepare to meet trials and temptations. The Creator has mercifully provided that, at your age, the regrets of parting should be compensated by the sanguine hopes and bright anticipations of youth. Still you are, in some degree, aware that your misfortune, joined to your inexperience, will make you more than usually dependent on the aid and advice, the good will and integrity of others. We have endeavored to give you habits and principles of self-reliance, means of judging for yourselves, what is best for you, and ability to earn your own subsistence, and transact your own affairs.

These habits of self-reliance, this ability to do for yourselves, you will seek to preserve and improve, as among the most precious of your possessions.

Still I repeat, you must expect to meet difficulties, and some, perhaps, such as you cannot unaided extricate yourselves from. Most of you, I am happy to believe, have affectionate parents and relatives, who will watch over your interests as over their own, and in whom, in every difficulty, you can find a sure resource, and should this natural reliance fail, or be wanting, come here for aid or advice, and you will never come in vain. Come to us, I repeat, with the confidence of children to a father. We shall ever be ready to redress your wrongs, to seek for you employment that shall ensure for you comfort and respectability; and, in those afflictions which only time and Providence can relieve, to afford the sympathy and advice that may inspire consolation, patience and cheerfulness.

The homes of most of you, however, are so remote that we cannot, in the usual course of events, expect to see all of you again in this life. To many of you, the advice, aid and

encouragement, which we shall ever be ready to give, will be too distant for reliance, and it will depend, after all, more on your own temper and conduct, than on the aid of others, whether you shall be happy or unhappy. Now, then, in this parting hour, I would address you with the last counsels of one whose daily prayer has been for your welfare, and the labors of whose life have been directed to your benefit. I trust you will receive them as you would the last advice of a father. If, following these counsels, you shall choose, at the beginning, the paths of prudence and virtue, you will avoid much unhappiness and mortification, many difficulties and dangers.

In those higher counsels drawn from the word of God, for your government in the great duties of this life, and in preparation for the life to come, you have been carefully instructed; and, I trust, have not forgotten them. Very few of you I am sure, none of you I hope, will be guilty of those grosser offences that expose men to the disgrace of legal punishment, or that exclude the perpetrator from respectable society.

Nor is this the occasion to explain the doc-

trines of the Gospel, or to urge them on your belief. This has been done, diligently and earnestly, in this Chapel, not merely every Sabbath, but every day. I trust that the anxious and faithful labors of your teachers, directed during years to this end, have not been in vain.

From some of the religious privileges which you have here enjoyed, most of you will be hereafter cut off, for the full benefit of public worship can be enjoyed by the deaf only when conducted in the language of signs. But you have reason to thank God that the means of grace, inaccessible to uneducated deaf mutes, have been brought within your reach, and many of them will still be open to you. You have the Bible, and have been taught to read it. With this holy book for your guide, and with the blessing of Him who never refuses to answer sincere and humble prayer, whether it be in the language of the voice, of the lips, or only of the heart, I trust you will seek, and if you seek will find, the peace and hope of the Christian, brightening the dark hours of life, and shedding a glory on the clouds behind which the sun of this life sets, to rise in the eternal morning of the better life to come.

Next to the counsels of God's word, you will rely on those of Christian friends. Your teachers have carefully explained to you what are the great fundamental truths in which all Christians agree. These you will find in the little volume of "Scripture Lessons" with which you have been furnished. But there are many lesser points on which the Bible does not speak so clearly, and on which good and pious men differ in opinion. Think not the worse of any sincere Christian, because, on unimportant points, as in matters of church order, or ceremonies, he may differ from those with whom you may be led to associate. In choosing your friends and counsellors, in religious matters, as well as in other concerns, you will bear in mind the Savior's declaration, "My servants ye shall know by their fruits."

Though you cannot hear, still you ought not to neglect regular attendance at some place of public worship. Taking with you your Bible and hymn-book, you can have the text and hymn pointed out by any one near you, and often your friends can communicate to you, with their fingers, or with a pencil, the principal points of the sermon. Thus

your own meditations will receive a profitable direction, and you will be better enabled to maintain a frame of mind suited to the day and the occasion. The habit of regular attendance on public worship on the Sabbath, once acquired, will soon become pleasant; and, what is of great importance, it will secure you the companionship of those whose society and friendship will be valuable to you. If you suffer yourselves to neglect public worship because you are deaf, you will be in danger of associating, on the Sabbath, with those who, though not deaf, habitually neglect the sanctuary, and profane the Lord's day. Such persons are generally of bad morals, and either from recklessness or design, will most probably lead you into evil courses that may ruin your prospects of happiness in this world, and fearfully endanger your higher interests in the world to come.

Pointing you to the higher counsels of God's word for those matters that are of eternal moment, I would now seek to impress upon you certain lessons of prudence touching your conduct in society, on the observance of which, your comfort or discomfort, your happiness or unhappiness in this life.

may very much depend. There are many errors into which one who is deaf is apt to fall, which may try the temper and patience of your acquaintances, and, if not corrected, may lead to coldness and neglect that will sorely wound your own feelings. With a little patience and attention on your part, such errors may be so far avoided that the kindness and sympathy of your friends shall not be unreasonably taxed, and you will soon learn that your own happiness will be better promoted by patience and forbearance than by giving way to habits of impatience, curiosity and petulance.

When you go into the society of those who hear, seeing the animated and changing expression of the faces around you, you will naturally desire to be informed of the subject of their conversation. In such cases, you must remember that it will often be difficult to answer your questions; that the light talk that amuses when first spoken, will often seem not worth repeating on the fingers; and that, if your questions be often repeated, they may at last become wearisome. More than your share of time and attention, you will generally find your friends willing to give

you. Many questions which would be very troublesome from others, they will, in pity to your loneliness, answer with pleasure and patient kindness; but you ought not to weary them too far; nor show feelings of petulance or impatience if you find them too busy at times to make you long explanations, especially when they are not able to converse with you with ease. Remember that you ought to seek, on your own part, to promote the comfort and happiness of those around you, and that one way of doing so is to avoid wearying them with what they may consider trifling enquiries. You will hardly fail to find a few companions who will learn to converse with you easily and rapidly, and who will take pleasure in gratifying your curiosity. To these your gratitude and love will be due. Warm affection and friendship, on your side, will seldom fail of a corresponding return, and those who really love you, and know that you love them, will think the labor light that will increase your scanty means of social enjoyment.

When I say that people may find it troublesome to hold a long conversation with you, I mean to speak of those who see you often,

and to whom your mode of conversation has ceased to be a novelty. It is quite as likely that you may be, yourselves, at times, wearied by the curiosity of those who have seldom or never seen an educated deaf mute, and who may wish to satisfy themselves that you can indeed, by means of writing, or your fingers, express your own ideas, and fully understand those of others. If you have the time to spare, it will be to your benefit to gratify this curiosity. Under the agreeable stimulus of admiration, you will write with greater ease, and acquire a more ready command of language by more frequent practice.

But when you have engaged your time to the service of others, you should be very sparing of conversation during the hours of labor or business. Unlike those who hear, you cannot talk and work at the same time; and with strangers especially, it will take so much time to converse beyond a few words by writing, that those who employ you may think your time unreasonably wasted.

An error into which the deaf and dumb are apt to fall, is by taking too literally the common language of compliment and civility. Some people have a habit, when they meet

or part with acquaintances, even those they do not like, of using certain forms of compliment, which those accustomed to them know to mean little or nothing. This I do not wish you to imitate, but you should be prepared for it, and must not always believe that people are glad to see you because they say so ; or that, if they tell you to come again as soon as you can, you ought to visit them oftener than you perceive to be convenient. By such language, they only mean to put you at your ease, to show that they are willing to be at some inconvenience for your sake, and to leave it to your own judgment how often you should come. By too frequent visits, as by too many questions, you will weary your friends, and the enjoyment of each visit will be much greater, when they are made at reasonable intervals.

Be especially careful in the choice of your intimate companions. You will naturally select those who are most kind and attentive to you, and who most readily learn to converse with you by signs, or by their fingers ; and if these are also persons of good reputation and firm moral principle, you will be fortunate indeed in your friends. But re-

member that those whose company you may prefer, merely because their company is agreeable, may sometimes lead you into evil courses, or may seek to gratify their own selfish ends at your expense. In choosing your associates, you will do well to consult your parents, or those who have the nearest interest in your welfare, and have proved themselves your friends.

Many of you may, in time, become heads of families, and there is nothing in human or divine law to exclude you from the bond of marriage. But I would warn you that the solemn responsibilities of the marriage state are not to be rashly assumed; and that hasty and ill-advised marriages are productive of much misery. The cases are very few in which even those who hear, and are of mature judgment, can be justified in taking so important a step against the advice of parents and friends; and, in your case, it will always be safer to be governed by that advice in a matter in which one hasty step may entail on you misery for life. If you feel content to remain single, it will be, in most cases, better for you; for, to the deaf, the cares and responsibilities of a family are greater trials

than to those who hear ; but if the opportunity of a suitable marriage, (by suitable, I mean with the prospect of a competence and of domestic peace,) should present itself, I would not advise you to reject it. I would only caution you that, in weighing the means of supporting a family, and the congeniality of temper and disposition, it is best to distrust your own judgment, which, in such cases, is apt to be warped to the side of your feelings.

I trust you will not consider what you have, at much expense to your friends and benefactors, been taught here, as learned for nought. Most of you can read books and newspapers with pleasure and profit, and this will prove a source of enjoyment that will compensate for your social privations. To those of you who are not thus far advanced, I say that you will, by diligent practice in reading, constantly improve in your knowledge of language. Let it be your continual desire and aim to perfect yourselves in reading and writing. Treasure in your memory the new words and phrases which you meet with. Spend a certain portion of each day in reading, selecting such books as you find most intelligible and interesting to you. This

exercise you will day by day find a source of greater enjoyment. With perseverance in reading, and especially by perseverance in conversing in words at length, you will soon master the remaining difficulties of language, and come to read books with as much ease and pleasure as your brothers and sisters who hear.

There is one more point on which I wish to say a few words. You possess the blessing of health, and have been carefully trained to manual skill and industrious habits. There are very few of you who will not, as soon as you arrive at lawful age, be able to earn wages sufficient to board and clothe yourselves respectably. I would caution you not to be tempted, by the love of luxury or display, to spend all you earn, much less to incur debts. Save weekly or monthly a small portion of your earnings as a resource in sickness and old age; but be careful to whom you lend your savings. The valuable institutions called Savings' Banks will be the safest place to deposit your money, but if you find none such at hand, you should always seek the advice of a judicious and *disinterested* person.

And now, having discharged the last duty

which, as your teacher and superintendent, I owe to you, I bid you farewell. Most happy shall I be to hear a good report of you. Bear in mind that your teachers and friends here will often think of you, enquire after you, and pray for you; that they will mourn if you fall into the ways of vice and misery: but will rejoice if you shall find that happiness which prudence, integrity, industry and kind feelings will secure in this life, and rejoice still more if you shall gain the Christian's hope of a happier life to come, when the tongue of the dumb shall be loosed, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

H. PRINDLE PEET.

INSTITUTION FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB.

July 15, 1847.

